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C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 000601

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND'S NEWLY FORMED MAORI PARTY TAKES FIRST SEAT IN PARLIAMENT

REF: A. WELLINGTON 423

[1](#)B. WELLINGTON 373

Classified By: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COUNSELOR,
TIMOTHY ZUNIGA-BROWN, FOR REASONS 1.5(B,D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Maori activist Tariana Turia used her decisive win in a July 10 by-election to launch the Maori Party, with herself as its first MP. Turia easily regained her seat in Parliament after resigning her Labour Party Government seat in May protest over the government's stance on Maori claims to NZ's foreshore and seabed. Turia and Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples pledged to challenge the current Labour Party incumbents in the seven Parliamentary seats reserved for Maori, but it is yet unclear whether they will run candidates for non-reserved Parliamentary seats in the 2005 general election.

[1](#)2. (U) Prime Minister Helen Clark said her Labour Party would not court Maori Party support, despite Labour's razor-thin, single-vote majority in Parliament. Labour has already indicated that they challenge Turia again in the 2005 election and expect to regain the seat. Clark also moved to secure the support of the remaining Maori MPs by dividing Turia's former portfolios among them.

[1](#)3. (U) Turnout for the by-election was low, with over 8,500 votes cast of an eligible 26,000 voters. (Note: Turia was elected a Labour MP with 10,002 votes in 2003.) Members of the Maori Party blamed voter apathy for the low turnout, with volunteers reporting that over 30 percent of all eligible voters contacted were unaware the by-election was occurring. Party organizers also pointed to the quarter of eligible Maori whose electoral roll information was incorrect.

[1](#)4. (C) Comment: Maori political movements in the past have found it difficult to form a coherent policy based solely on race and have often been hi-jacked by extremist elements. With a majority of Maori tribal leaders either advocating a politically neutral stance or backing Labour, it is unlikely that Turia's personal mandate will automatically translate into sustained Maori support for a new party.
Swindells